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Mikhail YEFIMOV

# NOVOSTI PRESS AGENCY

Answers Letters  
about

*Human  
Rights*  
in the USSR

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Novosti Press Agency Publishing House  
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## IN LIEU OF AN INTRODUCTION

This is not a treatise or survey but a modest attempt at assessing letters received recently by Novosti Press Agency Publishing House. Their authors have never met. They live in different countries, and believe in different gods (or none). Their names appear on these pages only because of their interest in our country.

The notion of distance has changed in an era flooded with information, an era when we share a cosmonaut's view of our ancient Earth as a tiny globe floating in an endless Universe. Science and technology enable people to get acquainted, to meet and even talk on a television "bridge". This should be a cause for satisfaction, although it remains true that human intelligence has been directed less at improving the flow of information than at military research.

It is proper to recall that the arms drive which has swept our planet was started by the Pentagon. The US military-industrial complex appointed itself arbiter of our destinies. This desire to dominate lay behind the search for super weapons based on the latest achievements of science and technology, achievements now used to search for weapons capable of extinguishing human reason.

God forbid that the other side should catch up or even overtake you! Such is the senseless logic of the tycoons who pump billions of dollars out of the state treasury to improve US combat efficiency.

To get these billions of dollars the military-industrial complex needs to invoke the Soviet threat. For 70 years arms merchants, strategists and general staffs have been clutching at this straw, better to frighten the credulous

6 Anything that can serve this purpose is deployed, the hand of Moscow, the KGB temptress, the SS 20s, and this primitive trick often works.

The American film *The Russians Are Coming!*, produced in the cold war period of the 1960s, made fun of one in a series of anti-Soviet campaigns. For all its shortcomings, this film demonstrated the futility of Russophobia.

Anti-Sovietism was not dispelled in the West as years went by. It assumed increasingly ugly forms in an atmosphere of mounting tension accompanied by the arms drive. Anti-Sovietism became a form of state policy in many countries. One product of this was the monstrous TV serial, *Amerika*, which depicts the United States under Soviet occupation. Meanwhile, not one Soviet soldier (barring the performers of the Alexandrov song-and-dance ensemble) has ever set foot on American soil. Yet, US intervention forces tried in 1918 to put to the sword the Soviet state. Such facts, however, are of little interest to the organizers of anti-Soviet campaigns. As they say, so much worse for the facts...

The logic of confrontation makes necessary the existence of an enemy image. If there is no enemy, one must be contrived. So the propaganda machine in the West has worked diligently for years to create the required image.

The "red monster" stereotype, crammed into the minds



7 of so many, frightens children, and sometimes intimidates even stolid law-makers voting for bigger war budgets.

Sometimes the anti-Soviet palette needs refurbishing, so new colours are added. Among recent propaganda ploys is the story of electronic monitoring equipment installed in the US Embassy in Moscow, the alleged repression of Soviet believers, "noiseless submarines", and so on. Facts don't exist: so much worse for the facts...

The real trouble consists less in these fantasies than in the fact that the West is often informed about the Soviet Union, about Soviet politics, in a very biased manner.

Unfamiliarity breeds mistrust, enmity and hatred. The capitalist world has been widening and deepening the trenches separating it from socialism despite all the new possibilities for learning more about one another.

Let us consider some questions raised in letters to Novosti Press Agency Publishing House.

## THE LETTERS

"Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since I am interested in Soviet politics and attend a Russian language class for beginners at our school I would like to share my views with you. I visited your country February 8-16, 1985. The trip was organized by the Soviet-Austrian Friendship Society. So I had a chance to get acquainted with your country. I particularly remember a discussion held at the Sovetskaya Hotel in Leningrad. The two Soviet professors present at the discussion answered all our questions like automatons. I did not like our Western social system being called capitalist all the time. Your brochures and books also call our system capitalist. I must tell you that I am proud of 'my' Austria, above all of our basic democratic principles. I have read in your booklet *Soviet Democracy: Principles and Practices* that the USSR has a democratic constitution. But I cannot understand your statements about freedom of speech, political freedom, freedom of the press, etc. The question immediately arises: why don't you have demonstrations against the government and the CPSU? When such demonstrations do take place they are, as is shown in Western films, dispersed by the militia and the KGB. All this contradicts the political freedom which you proclaim for yourselves. Further: why do you have only one Party? I do not think that the USSR with its 285 million people\* should have only one Party of 25 million members.\* I consider it impermissible that any

9 political discussion in your country is suppressed by the Party or the KGB. You can certainly say that I am a typical representative of the Western system. This is true to some extent. However, what will happen if a citizen of your country sends a critical letter to your Party's Central Committee? I think this citizen will get into trouble and may even be arrested. Can you call this political freedom? I would like to quote from one of your publications: 'In 1917, after the revolution, all former privileges were abolished.' But a comparison between the old part of Leningrad and the Moscow Kremlin presents a striking contrast. The Moscow Kremlin, which is also visited by Western tourists, has been carefully restored. Ordinary Soviet citizens are not allowed to appear in the Kremlin square where government buildings stand, and every such appearance is stopped by a militiaman's whistle. In the old part of Leningrad, however (everything is in proper order in Kiev, like in Moscow), the streets are in catastrophic state, there are chunks of plaster fallen from house walls, lying on the sidewalk, and the transport facilities are obsolete. Amid this contrast Party functionaries ride around in government-supplied cars and live in villas. What talk can there be of the abolition of privileges?

As regards freedom of the press, I would like to cite an example in connection with the meeting of the heads of the two super powers in Geneva in 1985. The President of Switzerland addressed General Secretary Gorbachev with a speech of greeting at the airport. The Soviet mass media distorted the meaning of the Swiss President's speech so that it followed that he almost unconditionally supported the policy of the USSR (I do not presume to say that it is not true, but it sounds implausible all the same.) Many interviews given by our Western politicians are also distorted by the Soviet mass media. Thus a false picture of our social system is being created. Soviet politicians always insist that all their statements should be printed by our press. I would like to recall here the New Year messages of greeting by Gorbachev and Reagan to the peoples of America and Russia. Gorbachev's address to the American people was shown without any interference, while Reagan's speech was interrupted and interfered with in various ways. This is how his message was presented in the countries of the Eastern bloc. You proclaim your ideology

\* In January 1985, the population of the USSR was 284.5 million. There are over 15 million CPSU members.



as the best in the world. Why then do you hinder a statement by a representative of another ideology? Can it really be that you are afraid? Can this be called freedom of the press? Please don't regard this letter as a provocation. I have written it only because I want you to write more truth about your system in your publications, to quote critical remarks regarding this system. You must know how your publications are responded to not only by a socialist but also by a democratically-minded person. I must say that I do not always agree with our Western propaganda. I disapprove of the Western radio stations. But I believe that propaganda in the Soviet Union is directed mainly at its own people. Suffice it to mention the huge busts of Lenin one can see in your squares and gardens. I personally regard Lenin a great man worthy of respect. But why spend such great funds on various monuments and busts? (This is capitalist extravagance!) But my eyes have been really opened as regards Western propaganda! I hope my letter will be of help to you.



With friendly greetings,

Udo Rader,  
A 6121 Baumkirchen,  
Milserstrasse 5,  
Austria."

We appreciate the desire of our Austrian reader to share his doubts. We agree with some of his observations. Our society is far from ideal.

But I would like to discuss certain points of principle.

Udo Rader writes: "Why don't you have demonstrations against the government and the CPSU? When such demonstrations do take place they are, as is shown in Western films, dispersed by the militia and the KGB."

And further: "...What will happen if a citizen of your country sends a critical letter to your Party's Central Committee? I think this citizen will get into trouble and may even be arrested."

"Ordinary Soviet citizens are not allowed to appear in the Kremlin square where government buildings stand, and every such appearance is stopped by a militiaman's whistle."

These—forgive me—naive inanities derive from films and spy stories which are widespread in the West. Udo Rader has unwittingly developed just indignation at the "Soviet customs" under the influence of anti-Soviet propaganda. Many believe that any critical remark against the authorities in the USSR inevitably leads to an arrest or at least a peremptory shout from the militiaman.

Our Austrian guest seems to have never opened a Soviet newspaper. He would have seen in them that sharp criticism of leaders of every rank is the order of the day. And it is normal for any leader, including Party officials, who has been criticized to reply.

Thus critical articles in *Pravda* were followed by replies from the Chairman of the Committee for State Security of the USSR (the KGB), from ministers and from the leaders of republics\*. Important officials were forced to resign as a result of public criticism. Among them were deputy chairmen of the Council of Ministers, ministers and secretaries of the Central Committees of republican Communist Parties

\* The USSR comprises 15 union and 20 autonomous republics.

and of regional Party committees. This was also the case of leaders of the Moscow Party organization, the Moscow Soviet, the first secretary of the Bashkir\* regional Party committee, a secretary of the Lvov regional Party committee in the Ukraine, and many others.

The CPSU Central Committee receives thousands of letters every day, most of them critical. Let me assure you that none of the senders were arrested on charges of criticism.

I leave some of the assertions of our reader from Austria to his conscience, such as the contraposition of the exemplary order in Moscow and Kiev to what is going on in the "old part" of Leningrad. I have no idea where Udo Rader could have seen chunks of plaster fallen off house walls and "streets in a catastrophic state".

The old part of Leningrad now looks like a vast construction site because of the planned reconstruction and repairs of multi-storey houses built at the end of the last and the beginning of the present century. After the flats have been modernized and their layout changed, these houses will again be offered to tenants who were given accommodation for the duration of the repairs by the local Soviets in other parts of the city, mostly in newly-built areas. There are many such houses, so that scaffolding can be seen almost in every street in Leningrad's centre. It is true houses awaiting reconstruction and from which dwellers are being gradually moved do not look very pretty since their fronts are not being repaired or repainted pending the general overhaul. Could these be the houses that struck our guest from Austria? But these buildings are not characteristic of the image of the city. The streets of Leningrad are cleaner and more attractive than those in Moscow. They are broader and better for traffic, for the city was built according to a uniform plan after its foundation in 1703. Udo Rader may have noticed that the reconstruction of streets and numerous embankments is under way in Leningrad, especially in its historical part which is mostly visited by tourists. This work naturally creates inconveniences for traffic in some places, but can hardly justify sweeping conclusions. Each of us may like or dislike a city. (Although I am a Muscovite, I consider Leningrad more attractive than

\* Bashkirs is one of the autonomous republics.

Moscow and am very fond of ancient Kiev which we call the "mother of Russian cities" and which is 1,500 years old.)

It is also hard to argue seriously that Party functionaries ride around in office cars and live in villas. Functionaries live in ordinary city houses. This applies to the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee as much as to an instructor in a district Party committee. But cars are certainly used as cars are used for official purposes by functionaries in Washington, Paris, Tokyo or Vienna.

But these are trifles which confirm that Western propaganda has concocted fables about us.

A more important thing is the accusation that we have no elementary freedoms and human rights.

Where is freedom of speech, freedom of the press, why is there only one party, why are there no anti-government demonstrations, etc?

Here it would be appropriate to add a few lines from other letters received by the Novosti Press Agency Publishing House.





*"May working people take part in strikes, and is it true that they are suppressed by troops?"*

(Abdou Chacour Idris,  
P.O. Box 1029, Alexandria, Egypt).

*"May a young couple have a church wedding without fearing persecution?"*

(M. Brzozowski, ul. Marsa, 85,  
00820, Warsaw, Poland).

There is no end to these queries, and they come from most diverse parts of the world.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

Is it true that human rights aren't observed in the USSR?

This question has aroused our anger and indignation over many years. How can people speak of a lack of rights in our country, the first socialist state! We boiled with indignation but did not reply.

As the number and sharpness of questions grew so did the self-estimate of the effectiveness of the efforts of the manipulators of Western public opinion. Since the Russians were angry, they were, according to an ancient maxim, not right. In this way one lie produced another and one anti-Soviet action nurtured another.

Let us see how we understand human rights and how we observe them.

One of the ancient codes of human behaviour, the Old Testament, formulated only bans, ten in number, which were called commandments (Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, etc.). This seemed to correspond to the level of civilization's development.

It was later that man acquired rights. Each social system implements them in keeping with its possibilities and moral values.

The socialist concept of human rights proceeds from the inseparable unity of the individual's rights and duties. Besides, we think it necessary to consider the entire com-

plex of socio-economic rights as a single whole. That is the fundamental difference between the Soviet and the Western approach to the problem of human rights.

Our Western opponents, who always seek to pose as the true defenders of the individual, limit their interests to civil rights only. They have little concern for the economic aspects of the issue, even the right to work and to housing. There is nothing surprising in this since the Western "defenders of human rights" prefer to protect bourgeois society from the material concerns of its members, who are free to seek their own daily bread and shelter.

Before discussing rights in our country I would like to make some general points.

First, the USSR, as a member of the international community, has incorporated in its legislation the main provisions of the international covenants on economic, social and cultural rights and on civil and political rights and of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. In some cases the Constitution of the USSR grants the citizens of our country even more extensive rights and freedoms than those stipulated in the above-named documents.

Second, Any social system, be it slave-owning, feudal, or whatever, determines relations between the state and the individual. In conditions of social inequality these serve the exploiters. While all seem equal the rights of millionaires, for instance, are broader than the rights of the millions of the unemployed.

The situation is different under socialism which has neither private property nor exploitation. This gives all citizens equal rights and creates a stable basis of social justice in society.

The socialist state draws its strength from the political activity of the masses, who themselves fulfil many functions of administration, management and control. These include the maintenance of public order by volunteers, who devote their free time to this duty, comrades' courts which deal with conflicts at enterprises and at places of residence, public controllers, etc. We shall return to this subject further on.

Here I would only like to stress that the atmosphere of Soviet society demands the activity of its members, their participation in both nationwide and local questions.

The "human factor" is a term recently added to our political vocabulary. What does it mean? The "human factor" is the main motive force of restructuring. Success cannot be achieved without the active and creative participation of the masses no matter how reliably machines operate and how carefully government personnel fulfil all instructions.

We have grand plans for rebuilding society, for improving and strengthening socialism. They will remain on paper unless everybody—from miner to minister, from student to academician—works enthusiastically. The recent period of stagnation was caused by the fact that word was not always followed by deed.

Since the mid-80s a wind of change has altered the tenor of life in the Soviet Union. The West began to speak of the "Gorbachev doctrine", which is, however, not a popular phrase in our country. We use such words as "perestroika", "glasnost", "new thinking" and "acceleration", which are all characteristic of our time. Numerous discussions are being now conducted in the Soviet Union on how to lead the country out of the economic difficulties in which it found itself.

"More socialism!" has become the motto of the day in the Soviet Union. This means, among many other things, broader democratization of all political, social, economic and cultural life. More power by the people, labour enterprise and social justice. From this follow broader rights for both individual and collective. But since socialist democracy has nothing to do with anarchy, rights and duties remain related.

Third. I have read more than once in the Western press and heard from diverse persons, from prime ministers to ordinary tourists, that the Soviet Union did a fine thing when it started restructuring. By so doing it is trying as best it can to approach the standards of democracy of the "free world". Though it has not quite succeeded in everything, its efforts are worthy of praise. Go on with your restructuring, they imply, and you will reach our level. Then we shall treat you totally as one of our own. This condescension reflects real attitudes.

Some in the West are intentionally or unintentionally convinced that the Soviet Union is now undergoing a kind of trial, as if the attitude of some "rich uncle" depends on

how the process of glasnost and democratization will proceed in our country. We are seen by some as taking exams on "how to behave in society" so that we may be admitted to the Western world.

Nothing can be more naive. It is particularly strange to hear such notions from Western political leaders who should know better than the misinformed man in the street.

Everything that is going on in the Soviet Union is determined by the tasks of our internal development. I cannot recall a single instance in the history of our state when any economic or social reforms were carried out for the sake of external effect. This is all the more true today when the economic might and political prestige of the USSR have made it a recognized world leader.

We are by no means seeking someone's favour by democratizing social life, by proclaiming the restructuring of the economy, politics and psychology. We are not at all eager to win someone's applause when we state that glasnost is a serious and lasting course. We do not care, believe me, whether they like it or not in the West that not only secretaries of regional Party committees but also factory managers and institute directors are now being elected in the Soviet Union.

The important socio-economic processes which are now going on in our country are due exclusively to internal causes and are being implemented in keeping with the objective requirements of socialist society.

And fourth. We shall see below how human rights are actually observed in the Soviet Union. (Not all the rights will be considered, for this is only the first in a series of such booklets. We shall discuss other aspects of human rights in the USSR in subsequent issues by answering letters we shall receive from our readers.)

I maintain that not every capitalist country can grant and guarantee its citizens as extensive rights and freedoms as our country does. And yet a paradoxical situation has been created by well-planned propaganda campaigns when a stereotype is being fed into the minds of many people in the West on the non-observance of human rights in a country which is in fact a worthy example to follow.

Western propaganda uses double standards to assess Soviet realities and those in the West.

Does the US President often speak out against the

crimes of the Chilean junta and the dictators Stroessner, Duarte, or Chun Doo Hwan? Has the British Prime Minister condemned Ku Klux Klan lynchings in the United States, or the white terror in South Africa, or the bloody suppression of civil liberties in Ulster?

Instead, many indignant words have been said in regard to the so-called "prisoners of conscience" and other dissidents who are said to be persecuted in the USSR. Nobody in the White House is bothered by the fact that Leonard Peltier, the well-known fighter for the rights of Indians, has spent over 12 years in jail on false charges. But ex-criminals expelled from the Soviet Union are received in America as national heroes. There has been much talk about mysterious "mental hospitals" in which the Soviet authorities allegedly keep political prisoners, and noisy propaganda campaigns have followed one another in the West.

But when the Soviet Union, guided by humane considerations, enabled people, such as Tarsis, to leave for the West, they also landed in mental hospitals there.

The campaign waged in the West concerning the alleged violations of human rights in the USSR has a long history. At one time it was decided that this was the most potent weapon in the psychological warfare waged against the Soviet Union.

But it is precisely in the sphere of human rights that socialism has indisputable advantages. The dispute between the two social systems can be settled only by time and the logic of historical development. And we are convinced that mankind will opt for socialism.

During its first years the young Soviet republic was forced to repel the intervention of imperialist states. To this day appeals can be heard for a "crusade" against the "evil empire" which is the USSR. Moscow responds with an appeal for a "new political thinking". For extremism can have unpredictable consequences in the nuclear age. Communists have always been against the export of revolution. But equally impermissible in their opinion is the export of counterrevolution, practised by our opponents.

It is necessary to proceed from the military-strategic parity of the USSR and the USA, of the Warsaw Treaty Organization and NATO. This is, alas, an indispensable condition of peace in the world which possesses 50,000 nuclear warheads. "Alas" because it is safer to build mutual

security not on missiles but on trust, which is what the Soviet Union calls for. We appeal to mankind to enter the third millennium without weapons.

Let us hope that Western policy-makers and NATO strategists will realize that war can no longer attain political ends. Then peaceful competition will demonstrate whether socialism or capitalism is more sensible and more democratic. Let the criteria in this historical dispute be the quality of manufactured goods, the quality of life, public health (moral and physical), cultural attainments, life expectancy, spiritual requirements, and so on.

Capitalist and socialist enterprises operate on basically different principles. This is an objective law. The two forms of democracy will be different in the same way. The very possibility of convergence is precluded. This is also a law of social development. Only the future will show which of the forms is better.

## THE RIGHT TO WORK

People realize themselves through work. The Soviet Union abides by the human rights principles stipulated in international law. The legislation of each country defines the relations between the state and the individual in its own way. It may be interesting to compare certain provisions of international law with the relevant articles of the Soviet Constitution.

Let us take for instance Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which reads:

"1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right to work, which includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts, and will take appropriate steps to safeguard this right.

"2. The steps to be taken by a State Party to the present Covenant to achieve the full realization of this right shall include technical and vocational guidance and training programmes, policies and techniques to achieve steady economic, social and cultural development and full and productive employment under conditions safeguarding fun-

damental political and economic freedoms of the individual."

We shall return to these provisions below.

Let us now quote Article 40 of the Constitution of the USSR, which says

"Citizens of the USSR have the right to work (that is, to guaranteed employment and pay in accordance with the quantity and quality of their work, and not below the state-established minimum), including the right to choose their trade or profession, type of job and work in accordance with their inclinations, abilities, training and education, with due account of the needs of society.

"This right is ensured by the socialist economic system, steady growth of the productive forces, free vocational and professional training, improvement of skills, training in new trades or professions, and development of the systems of vocational guidance and job placement."

As can be seen the right to work is understood in our country not narrowly, as an alternative to unemployment. The socialist state views it as one of the essential human rights, which includes a complex of socio-economic categories. These include a guaranteed job, improvement of vocational or professional skills in keeping with one's abilities, a fair system of pay which rules out discrimination, and the choice of trade or profession in accordance with personal inclinations as well as social needs.

Readers may claim (some do) that these are only declarations. What is the real state of affairs?

Unemployment has been nonexistent in the USSR since 1930. Under Soviet law no person may be dismissed without the consent of the trade union. Every dismissed person has the right to appeal to court. The management bears responsibility for illegal dismissal.

Twenty-five-year-old officer cadet Abdou Chacour Idris (P.O. Box 1029, Alexandria, Egypt) asks in his letter:

*"You write that unemployment disappeared in the Soviet Union 50 years ago and that Soviet people do not know what unemployment means. Is it true that there is at least one country in the world that can satisfy all its citizens in terms of employment in accordance with their wishes and qualification?"*

Such countries are few. But the Soviet Union is one of them.

People who are most likely to be seeking employment are school leavers and demobilized men (the USSR has compulsory military service). In 1986 about 40 per cent of the school leavers went to work, while the rest continued their education at university, college, or at specialized secondary school.

The objective of the current school reform in the USSR is to help young men and women choose a trade or profession and learn its rudiments while still at school.

College graduates get jobs in keeping with the applications for the given speciality made by enterprises and institutions. And the number of undergraduates and their specialization are planned beforehand, depending on the needs of the national economy. This helps to provide jobs for practically all young specialists.

I think that this answers one of the nine questions asked by L. Bachem of London, which is: *"Who decides where people work and in what trade?"*

To begin with the person in question should assess his or her own abilities and inclinations. School, special courses, open days at colleges (when professors and teachers give vocational advice) all help a young person find the right path in life. Exactly *where* a graduate from a college or a specialized secondary school should work is decided by the placement commission. It consists of representatives of the training institution's administration and public organizations and also of the enterprises and institutions which make applications for the services of young specialists. The best graduates are usually given a choice of places of work.

There are liable, of course, to be exceptions and mistaken choice of profession which leads to problems. But those are the general principles, and a mistake in choosing one's speciality needn't be tragic. For instance, Edita Piekha who majored in philosophy became a variety star, doctor Arkadi Arkanov is a well-known humorous writer, while engineer Vyacheslav Starshinov is the coach of a top-league hockey team.

Nearly 8,000 vocational schools of the Soviet Union train specialists in 1,500 "mass trades". Specialized secondary schools instruct in 500 specialities, and colleges and universities—in 430 specialities. Each year six million persons learn new trades and professions and twenty million improve their skills.

John Tamba Moiba Kpakawa, a 20-year-old school graduate from Bo, Sierra Leone, wants to know if there are many loiterers in the streets in our country. He also asks: "What determines wage differentials in the Soviet Union?"

I don't know whom John means by loiterers in the streets. We have neither unemployed nor beggars in the country, yet there are a lot of people in the streets even during work hours. Not all of them are idlers and loiterers (though some of them may be). They are mostly people who are not working at the moment, housewives, pensioners, or (in Moscow) tourists and visitors (every day about 1.5 million people come to Moscow and as many leave it). Some work in the evening or at night, while others are on leave.

The second question is much more difficult to answer. The socialist society that has been built in the USSR is based on the principle "From each according to his ability to each according to his work." It is true that the practical application of this thesis often involves complex problems.

The state pursues a firm line in this matter, which is determined by its strategic social policy. The pay of low-income workers is being raised and better incentives are offered to certain categories of factory and office workers. This applies, in particular, to teachers, doctors, engineers and technicians. Factory and office employees working in particularly arduous conditions, such as in the Far North, get extra pay. Differences in pay are due to various other reasons. There are, for instance, different pay scales, different categories of enterprises, etc. But along with objective reasons there still exist chance irregularities which can be difficult to explain. For instance, the earnings of an average-skilled worker are often above the salary of a college-graduated engineer. Such abnormalities are now being rectified.

A much more difficult problem stems from the fact that the level of pay does not correspond to the level of labour productivity; some are paid more than they deserve.

Despite all these problems there remains the immutable principle that socially useful work is the only source of income in socialist society. Yes, earnings differ and this difference is here to stay by virtue of the basic rule: "to each according to his work." But men and women get the same pay for the same work in our country. Higher salaries are

paid to those with greater experience and knowledge. I do not want to say that the standard of living is the same for everybody in our country. Different people have different incomes. But we have neither beggars nor millionaires.

Speaking of the right to work I would like to discuss one more question asked by Mr. L. Bachem, "Can Soviet people set up private business in any form?"

Yes and no, depending on what is meant by "business". A Soviet citizen may engage in individual labour activity if his "business" is socially useful. And, most important, exploitation of hired labour is prohibited.

Since 1987 numerous cooperative enterprises have been formed, mostly in the service sphere (cafés, repair shops, construction teams, etc.). The state encourages this activity in every way and provides cooperatives with materials and premises on easy terms. Its only concern is that individual labour activity should not distract people from the public sector.

There is another substantial point which is directly related to the implementation of the right to work and which has provoked speculative comment in the West. This subject is much discussed in our country, too.

Since Soviet enterprises are changing over to self-financing and self-sufficiency (up till now the state has supported even unprofitable enterprises), the question arises whether an enterprise can go bankrupt. If it does it should naturally be closed. What is then to be done with its workers?

Bankruptcy is possible. A bank can legally issue credits only up to a limit. After that the enterprise is closed, although the workers will not be left jobless. All will be given suitable work elsewhere. They may get a job which is worse than what they had. This is justifiable since they are also to blame for the closure of the enterprise because they did not work well enough, made goods of inferior quality, etc. But in any situation the guaranteed right to work, which is the main attainment of socialism, will not be infringed.

## THE RIGHT TO REST AND LEISURE

Article 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reads:

"The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work which ensure, in particular: ...d) Rest, leisure and reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay, as well as remuneration for public holidays."

In the USSR this right is guaranteed by the Constitution which limits the working week to 41 hours. Its actual average duration is 39.6 hours. This is because certain categories of employees working in unfavourable or arduous conditions (miners, X-ray specialists, etc.) and adolescents aged 16-18 have a shorter working day.

The majority of factory and office workers enjoy a paid annual leave of four weeks, the *minimum* being 15 days. The average duration of annual rest of every Soviet working person can be calculated as follows: 96 Saturdays and Sundays, plus 28 days leave, plus eight days of public holidays—a total of 132 days, or more than one third of a year.

A special category is workers who are also students attending evening classes or studying by correspondence. They are entitled to an additional leave provided by the management for the examination period. Postgraduates studying by correspondence also belong to this category. For these people, of course, "rest from work" does not mean inactivity...

Soviet people have enough free time. This is good for the individual and for society as a whole, provided that free time is put to good use: to strengthen or recover one's health, raise one's cultural and intellectual level, broaden one's view of the world, or to bring up children.

The state is not only willing to help but considers the rational use of free time by citizens one of its primary duties. Idleness breeds moral emptiness and social and political apathy, leading to alienation and encouraging drunkenness, drug addiction, money-grubbing and other vices.

The Soviet Union has more than 15,500 sanatoria, holiday hotels, campsites and other health-building establishments. In 1986 sixty-five million people spent their holidays there (almost a quarter of the population). Of these nearly 20 million had their accommodation paid for out of the state-insurance funds or the state budget. The trade-union committee of a Soviet enterprise or institution has the

right to decide what share of accommodation at a holiday facility (30, 50 or 100 per cent) it is prepared to pay, depending, above all, on the contribution of the given trade-union member to production and his earnings. In some cases the accommodation is paid for partially or fully by the management.

Readers often ask whether Soviet people can move freely around the country. The answer is: yes, they can.

In 1986 209 million took part in excursions and tourist trips around the country. Some went by raft down Siberian rivers, others went on hiking or motoring trips. Our country is vast enough for travel: it stretches for nearly 10,000 kilometres East to West spanning 11 time zones.

Speaking about the system of Soviet holidays I would like particularly to stress their obligatory nature. Paid leave in principle exists in most countries. But, for instance, in Japan (where I worked for many years) a person who takes a month off, is looked upon as an oddity. The Japanese take two or three days off, and together with public holidays have a total of 10-12 days' off work each winter and summer. Taking a long leave is considered unworthy of a hard-working person. The simple logic is that since they have done without you at the factory or office for a whole





two weeks they can dispense with you altogether. A special bonus is awarded in Japan to people who have worked all the work days of a year and have not taken a single day off or gone on sick leave.

The right to rest can be regarded as a "duty" in the Soviet Union, for the management is actually obliged to grant leave to every worker. Here I can cite my own experience. It so happened once that I was too busy at the office for most of the year to think of taking leave. Towards the end of December I was called before my chief who asked grumpily why I still had not gone on leave.

"For the simple reason that you gave me too many assignments," I answered.

"Owing to you I have had a very unpleasant talk with the chairman of the trade union committee who demands a written explanation," he said. "You will have to go on leave tomorrow."

So I was "forced" to go on leave on December 31 in order to spare my chief the necessity to explain on what grounds he had prevented an employee from exercising his right to rest. This example shows how carefully the trade union monitors the management's activity.

L. Bachem of Great Britain asks *whether Soviet citizens may spend their holidays outside the USSR*. His fellow countryman, L. R. Hanson from Epsom, asks a similar question. He writes:

*"I believe two million people travel abroad each year from the USSR. Yet in this country we are given to understand that it is not possible for Soviet citizens to travel freely to the West."*

Once again we have to deal with a stereotype which has taken shape in the West, or, more exactly, has been painstakingly cultivated by its propaganda, according to which "nothing is permitted" in the USSR. And although two million is not a needle in a haystack (and the actual figure is even higher) it is still claimed that no Soviet tourists go abroad.

Let me tell you, dear Mr. Hanson, that one can meet Soviet citizens on the Mississippi and the Ganges, in Mexico City and Tokyo, or on the shores of the Mediterranean or the Caribbean. Like others they can admire Gioconda and the Parthenon. They may be difficult to identify in a crowd since they do not wear hats with red

stars or fur coats reaching down to their heels, as our people are sometimes presented in cheap spy films.

The number of people who wish to see the world exceeds the number of foreign trips which Intourist\* can now offer. But this has nothing to do with prohibitions or the "iron curtain". The fact is that the country has a shortage of hard currency. There would be much greater opportunities for Soviet citizens to go abroad if more foreign tourists came to the USSR. But reciprocal tourism is expected to grow in the next few years. However, this is already beyond the question under consideration—the right to rest and leisure.

I would like to quote in conclusion from the CPSU Programme. It says:

"Intensification and increased efficiency of production and labour productivity will open up in the future new possibilities for reducing working hours and extending the period of paid holidays."

Such are our plans for the future.



\* The State Foreign Tourism Administration of the USSR.

## 28 THE RIGHT TO TAKE PART IN THE CONDUCT OF STATE AFFAIRS

Article 25 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reads:

"Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions... and without unreasonable restrictions,

"(a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives,

"(b) To vote and be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors,

"(c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country."

I think that this right is declared in the constitution of every civilized state. But proclamation and implementation are two different things.

How do matters stand in the USSR?

Abdou Chacour Idris of Alexandria, whom we have already mentioned, puts his question this way:

*"You write that all citizens of the USSR have the right to run the state. What does their participation in this consist of? Are they executors of decisions taken above or can they really oppose decisions from above? I wish you could substantiate your statement since I don't believe it."*

Let us try to sort things out.

Consider the figures. There are almost two and a half million deputies in Soviets of all levels, which are bodies of state authority in the USSR. Two-thirds of the deputies are workers and collective farmers—people directly engaged in productive work. Of the total of 1,500 deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, which is the highest body of state authority, 527 are workers and 242 are farmers (51.3 per cent of the votes).

What qualifications one must have to become a deputy?

Only one's good name, a good reputation and prestige. There are certainly many more such people than there are

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seats in Soviets, and it is from their midst that candidates are nominated. Representatives of the public of each constituency thoroughly discuss each nominee before his or her name is entered into the ballot.

Our electoral system is being improved. During the last election to local Soviets (June 1987) a number of constituencies voted on an experimental basis with ballots having several candidates. The electors themselves voted down several thousand candidates and elected more than one hundred deputies who had not been previously nominated.

In the USSR election expenses are borne by the state and candidates are nominated by the public (trade unions, youth organizations, etc.).

Another notable fact is that practically all citizens from the age of 18 (over 90 per cent) take part in elections. Cases when people do not come to polling stations are mostly due to personal grievances or dissatisfaction.

Thus, every Soviet citizen regardless of social status, race or nationality has a chance to be elected to a Soviet of any level if he has the required ability and desire.

But you do not have to be a deputy to take part in running state affairs. Under Soviet law the working people possess political power which enables them to govern the state, the economy and the social sphere. The most effective instrument of this power is the work collective.

This form of direct democracy and socialist self-government enables working people to participate in state and economic affairs. Few persons have remained outside of this process in the present turbulent upsurge of social activity by the people.

What can a work collective do?

Very much. For example, it makes proposals to local Soviets on the comprehensive economic and social development of their territories. A work collective considers drafts of laws and of decisions of local Soviets and makes suggestions that must be taken into account. Finally, as mentioned above, collectives nominate candidates for elections to Soviets and hear reports of the deputies as well as accounts of the executive committees of local Soviets, their departments and divisions. A collective has the right to raise the question of recalling a deputy who has failed to justify

30 its trust. Nearly 8,000 deputies have been thus recalled during the last 25 years.

We have already mentioned that Soviet society is living through a very complex, revolutionary process of restructuring.

I believe that its very first stage is being completed now, that of getting rid of everything alien and harmful that impeded socialist development. Next comes the stage of rectification designed to attain a higher level of socio-economic development on the basis of what has been achieved and on the strength of accumulated experience. We set our hopes above all on a decisive democratization of society and on glasnost. This presupposes still more active participation of the working people in the functioning of the administration and management system.

In June 1987 the Supreme Soviet of the USSR adopted the Law on the State Enterprise (Amalgamation). Its preamble states that the activity of any state enterprise should be effected in keeping with the principles of socialist self-government.

Today every worker takes part, as a fully-fledged member of his work collective, in the election of his team leader, shop superintendent and even enterprise manager. At general meetings factory and office workers discuss draft plans of economic and social development.

While previously the manager was also the member of the same trade union as the workers of his plant, he was appointed by the respective ministry and was accountable to his superiors. The new law directs the managerial accountability downwards, so that an executive has to answer to his or her electors.

A total of 170,000 proposals were made in the course of the nationwide discussion of the Law on the State Enterprise before it was passed, and many were taken into account. This testifies to the social activity of the population, its interested participation in management and the efficacy of such discussions.

I hope I have convinced our Egyptian reader. The facts given above are inconceivable in a capitalist society. It is unthinkable that workers could elect a foreman or a manager there, or that half of the US Senators could be "blue-collar workers".

## 31 THE RIGHT TO ASSOCIATE IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

"Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests." (Article 22 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)

In the Soviet Union this right is guaranteed by Article 51 of its Constitution which refers to association in public organizations such as trade unions, cooperatives, youth organizations, cultural, technical and scientific societies and creative unions.

I myself am a member of the union of cultural workers (my monthly dues amount to one per cent of all earnings, including salary, fees and bonuses). I'm a member of the Journalists' Union (to join which one has to submit the evidence of one's journalistic work and the recommendations of two members of the union to a competent commission. My annual dues to the union now equal five roubles\*). I am also a member of the All-Union Motorists' Society, which unites a great number of car owners and offers them assistance, from servicing to settling traffic conflicts (the annual dues are five roubles). In my youth I was also a member of the Spartak sports society which brings together a broad circle of amateur sportsmen, including journalists. For the annual dues of 0.3 roubles I could then use any sports facility from a track to a racing yacht. Our publishing house has now opened a branch of the All-Union Temperance Society but I have so far refrained from joining it.

One of the biggest societies in the Soviet Union is the All-Union Book Lovers' Society which has a membership in excess of 17 million—this being a nation that reads. Among the associations formed in recent years there are the All-Union Musical Society and the Union of Theatre Workers which draws together theatrical societies in the union republics. Creative associations include the Union of

\* One rouble equals 1.5 US dollars at the official rate of exchange (the end of 1987)

32 Composers, the Union of Architects, the Union of Writers and the Union of Artists. Inventors can join the Society of Inventors and Innovators.

There has been marked progress in the activity of republican societies for the protection of historical and cultural monuments. The voluntary assistance in restoration movement has gained in scope in recent years. Thousands of townsfolk and villagers of all ages and occupations work on their days off to help repair or restore historical and architectural monuments, palaces, cathedrals, memorial buildings and whole ensembles. Their voluntary work contributes to the effort of the societies for the protection of historical and cultural monuments.

It is well nigh impossible to list all the societies in the country, from associations of song-bird lovers and stamp collectors to "hard rock" fans, and cultivators of aquarium fish.

Trade unions are influential and authoritative public organizations in the USSR. They include 31 unions organized on a sectoral principle and have nearly 706,000 primary organizations with a total membership of almost 140 million (99 per cent of all working people).

A trade union can be established without any special permission of the authorities, it functions in keeping with the rules it adopts, does not have to be registered by any state agency and cannot be dissolved by administrative order.

The trade union supervises the observance of labour legislation and labour-protection rules, is in charge of state social insurance and runs most of the country's sanatoria, holiday homes and other medical, health-building and sports facilities. No one can be dismissed from work without the trade union's consent.

We are often asked why, since they are so influential in the USSR, trade unions don't organize strikes.

It seems strange at first glance that they don't resort to their most effective weapon in a state of working people. But there is nothing strange about it. A strike is the most extreme measure, especially in a society where the working people and those in power are divided by a class barricade. There are not, nor can there be, problems in socialist society (where power belongs, in the words of Western sociologists, to "blue collar workers"), the solution of which

33 would require factory or office workers to stop work in an organized way. Any industrial or social conflict can be settled by negotiation at a production meeting. The conditions of work and its safety, pay, democratic institutions, etc. are matters which are dealt with with the direct participation of the trade union.

## FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OF THE PRESS, OF CONSCIENCE

We have decided to pay special attention to these personal freedoms because they are indispensable to democracy and because discussion of them too often degenerates into speculative insinuation and false claims.

Without referring specifically to international law and Soviet legislation I will only say that the Constitution of the USSR (Articles 50 and 52) distinctly stipulates these rights for all citizens of our country. It is quite clear that freedom of speech and of the press assumes particular significance in conditions of glasnost and broadening democracy.

The first stage of the restructuring released a flood of criticism of shortcomings, which was natural and justified.

After a period of "staleness" our press, radio and television began exposing all kinds of malfunctioning of the state and public mechanism.

Glasnost means above all broad information for the public about the life of the country and an opportunity for every citizen to state his opinion on burning issues.

We have always considered the press a powerful weapon. The printed word which can inspire a person can also offend him or even inflict a grave moral wound. That is why all the material which is printed by Soviet newspapers and magazines is thoroughly checked and verified. The press is a potent mouthpiece of the public.

Some 8,000 newspapers and 5,000 magazines are published in the USSR. The biggest of these publications are the trade-union newspaper *Trud* (circulation 18 million) and the children's newspaper *Pionerskaya Pravda* (about 14 million). There are 115 TV centres and more than 5,000 local stations. Newspapers are published in all the main languages of our multinational state. The same applies to

34 radio and television programmes. In some republics, such as Armenia, broadcasting is done in four languages. Of the 55 languages in which the press is published 18 did not even have an alphabet of their own before the Revolution.

Who owns the mass media?

This is a normal question for a Western reader who knows that everything is a commodity in free-enterprise society and should consequently have an owner, a Murdoch or a Springer who sets the limits of freedom of speech for his newspaper or magazine and lays down the editorial policy.

There are no privately owned mass media in the USSR. They all belong to government or public organizations. For example *Pravda* is an organ of the CPSU Central Committee, the newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star) is published by the Ministry of Defence while *Moscow News* is a weekly publication of the Union of the Soviet Societies of Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and Novosti Press Agency.

The Soviet press is inseparably linked with its readers. Every day newspaper offices receive about 200,000 letters.



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Some of them are published, but all of them without exception must be answered. The general rule is that anyone who has sent a letter to a newspaper office or any other state agency is entitled to a reply within a month.

The onset of the glasnost drive has still further enhanced the public significance of the mass media. Newspapers and magazines are printing more and more biting material which is everywhere discussed with keen interest. Millions of listeners and viewers welcome new radio and television programmes. These programmes are up-to-date and interesting both in form and content and are effective.

Very popular is the TV programme "Problems—Questions—Solutions" during which leading officials of various departments (of public health, finances, light industry, etc.) answer questions asked by viewers over telephones installed in the studio. Some representatives of these departments are at times far from comfortable under the shower of quite serious and reasonable complaints from a nationwide audience. The programme helps reveal shortcomings in the work of various establishments and find ways of removing them, and sometimes it results in radical decisions. Certain highly placed executives were dismissed from their posts after the criticism levelled at them during "Problems—Questions—Solutions". Central Television's "Searchlight on Restructuring" spotlights urgent problems that brook no delay. This ten-minute item is very effective.

Similar examples can also be found at local studios. The Moscow TV programme "Good Evening, Moscow" arouses general interest and a desire to participate directly. In the course of the programme residents of all the districts of the Soviet capital have asked district leaders questions over the studio telephones concerning distribution of housing, the condition of the streets and their improvement, the supply of goods, and the work of district medical institutions. They received answers or explanations or were invited to the executive committees of district Soviets for more detailed discussions.

Article 49 of the Constitution of the USSR stipulates the right of Soviet citizens to criticize the shortcomings in the work of state bodies and public organizations and also states that "persecution for criticism is prohibited". This is an important point for there have been cases reported

36 when bureaucrats found pretexts for settling accounts with subordinates who criticized them, especially if they did it in public, still worse in the press. In such cases the public and also the law take the side of the critics.

Our readers may wish to look closer at a Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* which is published by the Soviets of People's Deputies of the USSR. It has been printed since prerevolutionary times is more than 70 years old and has a circulation of about 10.5 million.

Let's look at the issue of *Izvestia* published on Thursday, August 6, 1987 (Issue No. 218 /22025/, price four kopecks).

Like most central newspapers, *Izvestia* prints no commercial advertisements or announcements. Its size, usual for our newspapers, is six pages.

The first page contains official information on the visit to the USSR of Joaquim Alberto Chissano, President of the People's Republic of Mozambique, and important reports from abroad. The leading article is an agricultural survey entitled "Master of the Grain Field" which deals with the work of combine harvester operators during the reaping period.

Page two carries a large article, "The Right to Manage", on the problems of intersectoral scientific and technological complexes. Its burden is that departmentalism hinders the concentration of scientific efforts and production capacities for solving the tasks of scientific and technological progress. The authors of the article name those guilty of parochialism and write, in particular, that "the responsibility for the delay rests with Y. A. Nikitin, Deputy Minister of the electrotechnical industry." They sum up: "It is clear today that the system of management and organization of intersectoral scientific and technological complexes is in need of serious improvement. And the relevant conclusions should not be put off till tomorrow."

In an article written by diesel locomotive driver I. Vylegzhanin, transport problems in the Urals are discussed and instances cited of mismanagement on the railway. The article sharply criticizes Vladimir Ginko, Deputy Minister of railways, for failure to respond to alarming symptoms.

There is a big article from Simferopol in the Crimea

37 where the local authorities closed a "private-taxi" cooperative. It ends with these words:

"Contrary to successful practice the city executive committee (municipality—*Ed.*) chose to ignore those who are interested in the promotion of initiative. And the losers are the working people."

There are a few short news items including one on the publication of the last, tenth volume of the Defining Dictionary of the Kazakh Language (91,500 words and combinations), and another on the fact that one of the newspaper's readers, A. G. Zarubin from Krasnodar North Caucasus, who had been twice heavily wounded during the war and even been reported killed in action, contributed 12,000 roubles to the Soviet Peace Fund.

Page three carries an extensive interview with Professor Vladimir Moskalenko, deputy director-general of the scientific and production amalgamation at Sumy in the Ukraine, which is one of the first enterprises taking part in an economic experiment for the introduction of self-financing and self-sufficiency.

One of the many questions asked by the interviewer is what should be done to overcome inertia and help the restructuring. Vladimir Moskalenko replies:

"Those who cannot promptly readjust to the new demands should be moved without ceremony to places better suited to their abilities. This should be done in the Gosplan\* and at ministries exactly the way it is done at enterprises, by means of qualification certification and public assessment. Here liberalism can only make matters worse."

Well-known Soviet poet Yevgeni Yevtushenko has a moving article entitled "The Toll of the Chernobyl Bell" about a Soviet documentary film *The Bell of Chernobyl* which was released in Moscow and was noted at the Moscow Film Festival. "One cannot watch this film without tears without a searing pain in the heart," writes Yevtushenko, "but it teaches us that so long as there is mutual assistance in the human family there is still hope that this globe of ours will avoid extinction."

\* The State Planning Committee of the USSR Council of Ministers which effects the long-term and current planning of the Soviet national economy and control over the fulfilment of plans.



Page four is mainly devoted to official reports and information from abroad. It also carries a piece by John Carlson, a correspondent of the American newspaper *Des Moines Register*, giving his impressions of a cruise along the Volga. "I wanted to look into the eyes of the people whose missiles are aimed at my country," he writes. Having done this, he concludes that the residents of Rostov, Volgograd, Togliatti and Ulyanovsk are hardly interested in invading New York or of wiping the United States off the face of the earth.

Page five is mainly devoted to foreign information (a report from Hiroshima in connection with the 42nd anniversary of the atomic bombing, alarming news from the Persian Gulf where an explosive situation is being generated, and an item on the planned construction of a tunnel under the English Channel).

Page six is devoted to reports about life in our country, including a football review and information from the site of a natural calamity in Turkmenia\*. It also carries a large account of the life in the Soviet Armed Forces, entitled "Number One at the Red Button". An *Izvestia* correspondent interviews 35-year-old Major Vitali Shpakov, on duty at the "red button" at a missile base.

"There are similar systems in the United States," he says. "And in charge of one of them may be a man your age. Could you find a common language with him?"

"I would so much like to believe I could," was the reply. "The very fact that we have for many years been 'sitting idle' is splendid. I don't think he or I regret it. I am sure that the other fellow is perfectly aware that none of us can win this war. Another thing, a missile flight to any point on earth has been calculated down to a second and accurate estimates have been made of both human and material losses, to say nothing of the ecological damage. All this is horrible knowledge which, I am sure, weighs heavily on both of us. As you can see, we already have a lot in common..."

It is difficult to summarize the contents of a whole newspaper issue. Still our readers should be able to form a general impression and judge for themselves what acute

\* One of the 15 Union Republics.

problems the Soviet press raises and what its approach is to international life.

I may add in conclusion that Soviet law prohibits propaganda of war, violence and national superiority. Pornography is outlawed, too. No other subject is banned. Our goal is a humane society with healthy morals, built on the principles of self-respect.

A few words about freedom of conscience in the USSR.

This inalienable right, recognized by international covenants, is also guaranteed by the Constitution of the USSR (Article 52). Back in January 1918 the Soviet government passed the Decree on the Separation of the Church from the State and of the School from the Church. Every Soviet citizen has the right to profess any religion or none (this is a difference in principle from the idea of freedom of conscience in the West where citizens are not guaranteed the right to be atheists).

Functioning now in the USSR are 20,000 Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches, synagogues, mosques, and lamaseries. There are 22 monasteries and convents and 18 ecclesiastical educational institutions of the Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim and Jewish faiths. The Bible, the Koran, prayer books and theological works are published on a regular basis. They are distributed by the churches themselves and are not found in state book shops.

Our Polish reader M. Brzozowski from Warsaw puts these questions:

"Have school pupils the right to choose a world view of their own and can they study the rudiments of religion without fear for their future?"

"May any Soviet citizen go to church (even out of curiosity) without risking to get a talking-to by Party people and his superiors at work?"

"Why are teachers and instructors disqualified when some of their pupils attend religious lessons at church?"

There should be no ambiguity in the matter of freedom of conscience in the USSR. Since the church is separated from the state, educational institutions (which are all run by the state) conduct no religious instruction. (It was compulsory in tsarist Russia, but only in respect of the Orthodox Church, which was predominant in the multinational Russian Empire. All faiths in our country were given equal

status only after the church was separated from the state.) Everyone has the right to choose a world view, but school is not a place where one can study religion. Religious propaganda is in our case confined to church

I have not heard of a single case of "disqualification" of a teacher or instructor because their pupils attended church and I don't think it is true. It clearly follows from Soviet legislation that no one may hinder a person wishing to profess a religion, just as no one may forcibly draw a person to religion.

Sociological surveys have shown the number of professed believers to be about ten per cent of the country's adult population.

It should also be noted that official registration of births, marriages and deaths is done only by local Soviet or their agencies, though anyone is free to perform at church such religious rites as weddings, baptism, etc

Any Soviet citizen may go to church (if only out of curiosity). It is hard to imagine a person who is a believer and an atheist at the same time. It is equally hard to imagine that a member of the Communist Party, a person firmly adhering to the principles of materialist ideology, can also believe in God, i.e., profess idealistic philosophy. Neither the church nor the Party needs pharisees.

In discussing the role and place of the church in the life of Soviet society, we must not forget its peace-making activity which commands great respect in our country. Many important international undertakings in defence of peace have been organized by the church. This year we have marked the millennium of christianity in Russia. That was not only a religious occasion but also a major celebration of Russian culture, and it evoked considerable public response.

## SEVERAL "WHYS"

I don't know whether I have satisfied the curiosity of our correspondents, if I have given exhaustive answers or succeeded in dispelling delusion and prejudice. My wish was

to tell them, even in the briefest form, how we understand freedoms and how we use them

I want the reader to understand that the Soviet Union is a country of triumphant socialism, which is not divided into rich and poor, and whose political system aims to end social inequality. It would be naive to think that we have managed to resolve all our problems (because every epoch will pose new tasks), or that ours is a life of abundance, and benefits pour on us like manna from heaven. But at the same time it is wrong to think that we live in conditions of strictly regimented poverty, on the outskirts of scientific and technological progress.

It is wrong to view the Soviet Union and its people through a distorting prism of ill will, and would be better to lay aside anti-Soviet clichés and to forget the enemy image inculcated probably from school years. While we are by no means angels neither are we devils incarnate as some picture us. It certainly gives us no pleasure to hear our country called an "evil empire" amid appeals for a "new crusade" to wipe it off the face of the earth. We find tactless and even very dangerous "jokes" to the effect, for instance, that orders have been given five minutes ago to begin nuclear bombardment of the USSR. It shouldn't be difficult, I think, to understand our feelings on this score.

As I was writing these lines it occurred to me that it is wrong for the "publishing house—reader" relations to resemble a one-way street. Let us make it a two-way road. I did my best to give an honest answer to many questions we receive and would like in turn to put several questions to our readers. Let them help us find an answer to many "whys" which perplex Soviet people. It may well be that these questions are due to the stereotypes we have developed in regard to Western countries. It stands to reason that the years of the cold war, which started in 1946 with Churchill's notorious speech at Fulton, and of the "psychological warfare" which is whipped up today must have had their effect.

Still, we do not attack our opponents but are only fighting them off. Films like *Rambo* or James Bond are not shown in the Soviet Union, bestsellers of the *Gorky Park* type are not sold in our shops and our TV screens are free from such horrendous productions as *Amerika*.

(Incidentally, Soviet television tried to buy the serial to show it to our public. But the Americans for some reasons refused to sell it.)

New political thinking is indeed taking root in the Soviet Union. We understand that confrontation with the United States and other Western countries runs counter to our national interests. But this does not at all mean that the USSR is prepared to give up its principles. It is not. But it proceeds from the immutable truth that nothing is more precious than the cause of peace in our age. We hold that we need to know and understand one another better. If this is so then we must have dialogue.

Therefore permit me also to ask some questions. And I would wish the reader to use the same yardstick as I did. Let us try to consider together where and how human rights are observed.

The year 1987 marked many jubilees, including the 70th anniversary of the October Socialist Revolution, the 200th anniversary of the Constitution of the United States, 10th anniversary of the Constitution of the USSR\*, 40th anniversary of the Taft-Hartley Act, 40th anniversary of the establishment of the CIA, and the 50th anniversary of the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in an American jail. Each of these events gives food for thought.

Let us recall how the first bourgeois Constitution was born, which was truly of epoch-making significance. As *Time* magazine\* wrote, the 55 prominent American citizens who had gathered in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787 had no distinct idea of the significance of what was taking place. Neither the Congress nor anybody else had authorized them to establish a new political system. They were young and ambitious. There was not a single woman among them, to say nothing of Negroes or Indians.

Those men proclaimed the establishment of a republican political system in which slavery was legalized and only about ten per cent of the population, white house owners, had the right to vote.

James Madison who was proclaimed the "father of the

\* The previous Constitutions of the Soviet state were adopted in 1918, 1924 and 1936.

\* *Time*, July 6, 1987

Constitution" was the son of a rich landowner who was naturally a slave owner. The 55 "angry men" spent nearly four months debating whether slaves should be considered people or property. The Constitution of the country was finally proclaimed on September 17.

But it was much later that the Bill of Rights was adopted, and it was only after the Civil War of 1861-1865 that the 13th Amendment prohibiting slavery was passed. Many years were needed before the 19th Amendment was adopted which granted women the right to vote.

This is distant history now. But have all the problems of racial and social discrimination been left in the past?

*A mere 0.002 per cent of the US population is known to control 50 per cent of the country's national wealth. Why?*

*Eighty-five per cent of American Indians living in reservations are unemployed, 75 per cent of them go hungry. Three out of five newborn babies die there. Why?*

The Declaration of Independence of the United States reads: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

*There are 165 million privately owned firearms in the United States. A murder is committed every 24 minutes and a woman is assaulted every seven minutes. Why?*

*There are nearly one and a half million prisoners in the United States, of whom 370,000 (almost 25 per cent) are victims of all manner of discrimination. American lawyers believe that they should be regarded as political prisoners. April 15 is marked in the country as the Day of US Political Prisoners. Imprisoned since 1984 are Carl Cabot, a priest, and Helen Woodson, mother of 11 children, who took part in a "non-violent action of civil disobedience", i.e., in an anti-war demonstration. Thirty-four Americans who are kept in the jails of 15 states were sentenced to death for offences committed when they were under 18. The Lutheran priest Roth Douglas, who protested against mass dismissals, was first deprived of the right to read sermons, then of his parish and in the end was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. Why?*

*There are about 14 million unemployed in the United States, of whom only one in four gets relief. But even today*

44 *there is not a hint of the right to work in the basic legislative acts of the country. Why?*

*The very principle of respect for the basic human rights and freedoms was included in the UN Charter on Soviet initiative. The USSR was one of the first to sign the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and ratified it in 1973. The United States has not ratified it to this day. It was through the fault of the USA that a convention which included a section on human rights and which had already been agreed upon by all European countries was not signed at an international conference held in Berne. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union stated that it would observe it. The United States has rejected everything. Why?*

And now let us move to the Old World so as not to produce the impression that all my questions are anti-American. In 1987 Willi Brandt published a book, *Mishandled and Mutilated Human Rights*, in which he wrote:

*"I did not expect that there could be so many relapses of barbarity on earth four decades after the Nazis' atrocities, after their attempts to exterminate whole peoples."*

The prominent West German leader had good reason for saying that. Suffice it to mention the sinister escapades of the neo-Nazis or the notorious bans on professions in Federal Germany.

*According to press reports, about 3.5 million West Germans have been screened for loyalty during the last 15 years. As a result, over 10,000 people have been dismissed from state institutions. Why?*

*The West German press agency DPA reports that, according to official data, from one to two per cent of the population of Federal Germany—400,000 to 800,000 people—are registered as illiterate. Added to them should be several million people whose ability to read and write is, mildly speaking, inadequate. Why?*

And the last question.

*According to eye-witnesses a Palestinian gets 15 shekels a day and an Israeli 120 shekels for the same work on Israeli-occupied territories, more exactly, in the Gaza Strip. Why?*

Many more such questions could be asked, but we shall put a stop here.

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We ask these "whys" not out of idle curiosity. We are eager to know the opinion of our readers. We seek to find out by comparison whether a common approach is possible to problems which today agitate everybody, regardless of ideology, race or social status.

Let us discuss these problems together.

We await your answers and questions.

**Mikhail YEFIMOV**

*Novosti Press Agency Answers Letters about Human Rights in the USSR*

*Dear Reader,*

*We hope that you have found this publication interesting and useful. We would be most grateful if you could fill out this questionnaire. All you have to do is put a cross in the appropriate box, or where such boxes are not provided, express your opinion briefly and legibly.*

**1. How long have you been familiar with Novosti publications?**

First time	Less than one year	1-2 years	3-5 years	Over 5 years
001 <input type="checkbox"/>	002 <input type="checkbox"/>	003 <input type="checkbox"/>	004 <input type="checkbox"/>	005 <input type="checkbox"/>

**2. Where did you obtain this publication?**

**3. What is your opinion of this publication in terms of ...**

	Good	Satisfactory	Could be better	Hard to say
...informative content?	021 <input type="checkbox"/>	022 <input type="checkbox"/>	023 <input type="checkbox"/>	024 <input type="checkbox"/>
...up-to-dateness?	025 <input type="checkbox"/>	026 <input type="checkbox"/>	027 <input type="checkbox"/>	028 <input type="checkbox"/>
...convincing argumentation?	029 <input type="checkbox"/>	030 <input type="checkbox"/>	031 <input type="checkbox"/>	032 <input type="checkbox"/>
...clear, easy-to-read style?	033 <input type="checkbox"/>	034 <input type="checkbox"/>	035 <input type="checkbox"/>	036 <input type="checkbox"/>

**4. What is your opinion of the English translation?**

037 <input type="checkbox"/>	038 <input type="checkbox"/>	039 <input type="checkbox"/>	040 <input type="checkbox"/>
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041 <input type="checkbox"/>	042 <input type="checkbox"/>	043 <input type="checkbox"/>	044 <input type="checkbox"/>
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**Of the quality of the printing and illustrations?**

045 <input type="checkbox"/>	046 <input type="checkbox"/>	047 <input type="checkbox"/>	048 <input type="checkbox"/>
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Михаил Борисович Ефимов  
АПН ОТВЕЧАЕТ НА ПИСЬМА ЧИТАТЕЛЕЙ  
О ПРАВАХ ЧЕЛОВЕКА В СССР  
на английском языке  
Цена 25 коп

6. What is your overall impression of the publication, its good and bad points?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What would you like to read about in our publication?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. If you have long been familiar with Novosti publications, which did you think were the best?

\_\_\_\_\_

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9. If you are a regular reader of Novosti publications, say in which ways you find them useful. They...

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Other ways: \_\_\_\_\_

Your occupation \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ years

Sex M ☐ F ☐

Education Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ Higher ☐

Place of residence Village ☐ City ☐ Town ☐ Minsk area ☐

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We would greatly appreciate it if you gave your opinion about the publication in greater detail in a separate letter. Thank you for your cooperation.

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